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Sent: 03/20/2020 12:41 PM

Subject: A Message from the Provost to All Pitt Faculty Members



University of
Pittsburgh Office of the Provost

Dear Colleagues,

Across all our campuses, over the course of this one, intense week, you have made Herculean efforts to move your courses to remote and online teaching. I congratulate you on your excellent and speedy response and want to thank you for your flexibility, innovation, and dedication during this time of transition.

Our collective efforts will contribute in significant ways as we seek to reduce the spread of COVID-19. The health and safety of every member of the Pitt family is our top priority. That is why we are taking exceptional steps to reduce risk. Working together, we will “flatten the curve.”

This letter focuses primarily on resources and guidance related to teaching. [Pitt Research has issued guidance](#) concerning essential research. Vice Provost Nathan Urban will also follow up this letter with one to graduate faculty, students, and post-docs.

The [University Center for Teaching and Learning](#) is serving faculty across schools and campuses, as well as providing support to school- and campus-based tech staff who are offering faculty significant assistance to get ready. Your engagement with the center has been extraordinary: you have accessed their web pages, designed exclusively to help faculty adopt the new teaching models, over 8,000 times, and more than 1,300 of you have attended their virtual workshops since March 11. Please continue to explore and take advantage of resources provided by both the center and by [Pitt IT](#) for remote teaching and working. I especially want to thank Cynthia Golden, Associate Provost and Executive Director for the University Center for Teaching and Learning; Mark Henderson, Chief Information Officer and Vice Chancellor; and their excellent teams for their tireless work in support of our teaching needs in this new environment.

Please note the list of available resources at the end of this letter. Pitt IT's 24/7 [IT Help Desk](#) can assist you day or night. Please do not hesitate to report any difficulties you experience with your technology or internet access. The IT Help Desk can also assist students who cannot access the technology because they do not have needed equipment or access to internet service.

Access to Faculty Offices and Labs for Instructional Purposes

In accordance with the measures [announced Wednesday by Chancellor Gallagher](#) and with the [Governor's Order of March 19](#), faculty members may not use their offices, classrooms, or teaching labs for instructional purposes. We must all transition fully to remote teaching at this time. However, our teaching mission is considered to be essential, "life-sustaining" work. As such, if you have a critical need to access your office or lab to retrieve items necessary for continuing your remote teaching, you may call Pitt Police to gain access to your office (412-624-2121). Should you experience a technology disruption at home, you may temporarily use your office to teach remotely until a solution is provided by Pitt IT. To do so you will need to call Pitt Police.

In this rapidly changing situation, a working group convenes daily to reach decisions about facilities across campus. Updates are posted on the [Office of Emergency Management site](#), as well as on the [University Library System site](#). Similar updates are being posted on websites for each of our regional campuses.

Guidance for Grading This Semester

As faculty members, you have gone to extraordinary lengths to construct a remote learning environment that will maximize our students' ability to accomplish the learning outcomes of their intended course(s) of study without jeopardizing the health of any members of our University community.

At the same time, the uncertainty of this unprecedented situation is a source of significant anxiety for many of our students and their families. To help mitigate student stress and facilitate academic success in the coming weeks, the University is adopting a significant level of flexibility in course grading for this semester. After the conclusion of this term, all undergraduate and graduate students will be permitted to convert any of their courses during this spring term from a letter grade basis to a satisfactory (S)/no credit (NC) basis. Moreover, all courses that are awarded S grades will count toward graduation/degree requirements and

satisfy future course prerequisites, while those courses awarded NC grades will not negatively impact a student's GPA.

By allowing this change to be made after grades have been assigned, we are enabling students to consider all of their options and have time to contact their advisors to fully discuss the potential impact of their decisions, including effects on specialized program accreditation, external scholarship eligibility, impact on future educational pursuits (i.e., graduate school, medical school, residency applications), etc. Additional guidance aimed at helping you, students, and advisors with this process and decision will be forthcoming.

Graduate Classes

Traditional in-person graduate classes must also be conducted remotely. Faculty should be communicating with their students as soon as possible about how this will take place. No courses, workshops, lab meetings or journal clubs should meet in person. None of these are permitted under the Governor's order.

Thesis Defenses and Other Milestones

All requirements for in-person participation in thesis committees and other milestones are suspended. Where possible these milestones should not be delayed solely due to the switch to online or to limitations of technology. Students are not required to provide hard copies of theses or other documents, since access to University and other printing services will not be available. [Support for electronic thesis and dissertations](#) is still available.

Teaching Assistants and Teaching Fellows

Teaching Assistants and Teaching Fellows will continue to be trained in, and to support, teaching as we move online. TAs and TFs will consult with their faculty to understand the expectations. In no case should this transition result in students on a TA or TF appointment being asked to spend more than an average of 20 hours per week on their TA or TF assignment or to travel to campus to carry out their duties.

Academic Term Dates

At this time, there are no plans to modify the end date of the spring semester or change the start date of any of the summer sessions. As needed, flexibility will be granted to faculty members in conveying final

term grades, as well as to departments with respect to certification of graduation requirements.

Due to the week that has been devoted to transitioning to remote learning, the academic term—which is typically 15 weeks—has been shortened to 14 weeks of student effort. In accordance with the U.S. Department of Education Code 34 CFR § 668.3, the University has requested a temporary reduction in the length of the academic year. In anticipation of the Secretary granting this request, please construct your curriculum for the remainder of the semester with the aim of achieving your course's critical student learning outcomes via normal student effort over the remaining five weeks of the original academic year (inclusive of finals week).

Summer Term Planning

Planning for the summer sessions should continue with the expectation that courses will be delivered remotely.

Option to Extend the Tenure Clock

Our current policy on tenure clock extensions is sufficiently broad to accommodate needs of faculty in the tenure stream to extend the probationary period due to impacts of COVID-19. Faculty may request a [Type A temporary extension of the tenure clock](#) upon recommendation of your dean or campus president. The Provost will approve requests from faculty members who need the extension because of interruptions in research due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, even if they have had one in the past. Faculty—especially those who are nearing their mandatory review period—are encouraged to talk with their chairs or deans about a Type A extension as soon as possible. Questions can be directed to faculty@pitt.edu.

Student Opinion of Teaching Surveys

Some have asked if we will use Student Opinion of Teaching Surveys this term in the same manner as the past. While the University does not require use of OMETs, we do require evaluation of teaching. Many academic units across Pitt do use and rely on OMETs as an indication of teaching effectiveness.

Student Opinion of Teaching Surveys administered by the Office of Measurement and Evaluation of Teaching (OMET) will be available this term as usual with two qualifications: (1) OMET survey results will not be used as part of the 2019-2020 annual review process or submitted as

part of a dossier for promotion or tenure for T/TS/AS faculty unless a faculty member requests them to be included; and (2) a few questions will be added to this term's standard survey to collect data about our collective experience with remote instruction. Aggregated results about the students' experiences with remote teaching this term will provide much needed insight and will be shared with the University community.

I am deeply grateful to each of you for your resilience and understanding, as well as for sharing with me your questions, suggestions, and concerns. While I know we will experience additional challenges in the days and weeks ahead, I also know that you, our outstanding faculty, are committed to providing our students with the best academic experience possible under the circumstances. Ours is a University that has a proud history of rising to meet far-reaching opportunities and of discovering new solutions to improve the world. In our actions now, we are continuing to build our legacy.

Hail to Pitt!

Ann E. Cudd
Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor

Available Resources for Teaching Remotely

- Pitt IT's new [Virtual Lab](#)—available from any location with an internet connection, using almost any computer or mobile device—provides much of the software available in Student Computing Labs on campus.
- [Zoom Video Conferencing](#) combines real-time chat, content sharing, and video in an easy-to-use interface integrated with [CourseWeb \(Blackboard\)](#) and the University's new [Learning Management System \(Canvas\)](#).
- You can host an audio-only conference with [Microsoft Office 365 Audio Conferencing](#).
- [Microsoft Teams](#) includes instant messaging, audio or video calls, desktop and file sharing, and more—and works seamlessly with Office 365 programs like Word, Excel, and OneDrive.
- You can use online versions of [Microsoft Office 365 Pro Plus](#) or download and install apps on Windows or Mac PCs, at no cost, on up to five devices.

- [OneDrive and Box](#) allow you to store files and co-edit documents in the cloud—and are fully integrated with Teams and other Microsoft Office 365 tools.
- [Software Download Service](#) provides a variety of free software—including Antivirus (Symantec Endpoint) and Antimalware (Malwarebytes) Protection and Malwarebytes.
- [The Pitt App Center](#) provides one-stop access to University-related mobile apps.
- [PittNet VPN \(Pulse Secure\)](#) allows you to remotely access restricted network resources. Note: You do not need to use PittNet VPN to access University resources protected by [Pitt Passport](#), such as Pitt Email and Calendar, Office 365, or My Pitt.
- Virtual desktops installed with the most-used enterprise applications (Office 365, Creative Cloud, etc.) are currently available to faculty and staff. If interested, units should make inquiries to the [Technology Help Desk](#).